

**Speech by John Elkann, Chair of the Agnelli Foundation, on the Occasion of Establishing the Agnelli Chair of Italian Culture at Peking University (PKU)**

*Ta Jia hao!*

Esteemed members of the China-Italy Philanthropy Forum, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to participate to this forum, which brings together entrepreneurial families, academic figures, and scholars from diverse backgrounds, all united by a commitment to supporting the common good through philanthropic initiatives.

I am very happy to share this moment with you — a moment that is especially moving for me: in just a few hours, we will inaugurate the new Agnelli Chair of Italian Culture. It will be established here in Beijing, at Beida, a leading university of China and one of the best of the world.

This is the first time a European non-profit institution has funded a Chair in China.

This fact makes me incredibly proud, both as an Italian and as a member of a family that has made education the primary focus of its philanthropic efforts.

The presence here today of the President of the Italian Republic is the highest endorsement we could hope for.

Starting next spring, students at Beida will be able to discover and delve into Italian Culture in all its dimensions: humanities, social sciences, natural and applied sciences, ranging from subjects as diverse as cinema, particles physics, industrial design, sport, and many others.

The Chair will embrace all expressions of Italian creativity, across all eras: the accomplishments of the past centuries, which have made my country known around the world, as well as the more advanced and modern facets, sometimes less well-known yet very significant, which together shape the contemporary Italian cultural identity.

Professor Romano Prodi will serve as the first holder of the Agnelli Chair, and I would like to thank him for the passion with which he has, for many years, fostered relations between Italy and China. For each academic term, a Chairholder will be chosen by a joint committee formed by Peking University, the Agnelli Foundation, and the University of Turin. Let me thank the Deans of both universities for their cooperation, and I wish to extend a special thanks to Giovanni Andornino for his personal and professional commitment in making this initiative possible.

In addition to teaching, Chairholders will act as ambassadors of Italian culture in China, engaging with academic communities and connecting with students and scholars of any field who show an interest in Italy. But equally learn from them about your country, your culture.

This, perhaps, is the heart and true essence of this initiative.

The new Chair is indeed a bridge.

A bridge we are building to foster dialogue between two countries. Through this dialogue, it aims to bring together two worlds, two cultures, in a spirit of mutual collaboration.

Italy and China share a deep relationship that dates back centuries. Both have given and received countless inspirations from one another.

The Chair that the Agnelli Foundation establishes here today in Beijing is intended to honor and continue this millennia-old relationship, by creating an harmonious cooperation.

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Collaborating with the academic world has been central to our activities.

In Italy, for instance, the Agnelli Foundation established a Chair in 2013 in honor of my grandfather, Giovanni Agnelli, at Bocconi University in Milan.

We recently celebrated the 25th anniversary of another academic program dear to us, the degree in Automotive Engineering at the Polytechnic

University of Turin, my hometown. Agnelli chairs have also been established in the UK at Oxford University on Italian literature and in America at Johns Hopkins University on international relationships: it was done with Henry Kissinger, a friend of my family and a friend of China with whom he started to build a bridge.

Our motivation for launching and developing these programs lies in our strong belief and passion for education.

With this spirit, the philanthropic foundation of my family, the Agnelli Foundation, has focused its activities from early childhood services to higher education.

We work to help people learn sooner, more effectively, and to a greater extent. Over the years, we have increased our commitment with research and its practical applications aimed at improving Italy's public school system. We guide Italian families in choosing the right schools for their children. We support teachers in experimenting with new methods to engage students. We

have built and rebuilt schools. We help thousands of students overcome physical and social barriers to succeed in their studies.

We do all of this because learning allows us to better contribute to society and be more engaged in our communities. Knowledge and education are also the foundations of a deeper dialogue among countries and people, as we are proving here today. Many of your families share this very commitment, which serves as an additional inspiration for me and my family in the pursuit of our philanthropic activities.

Your inspiration is our inspiration.

The Chair we inaugurate today wants to bring our countries even closer. Across this new bridge that we are building together, the ideas of countless students and researchers will travel in both directions with the desire to discover and deepen their knowledge of Italian and Chinese culture, which will help us understand each other better and learn from one another.

I would like to close with an old latin saying *Docendo discimus* ("By teaching we learn") which has a perfect correspondent in the ancient Chinese literature: jiào xué xiāng zhǎng [教学相长]

I believe it conveys the spirit of the Agnelli Chair of Italian Culture at Peking University and will inspire (or be the inspire of) all our Chair holders!

Thank you, Grazie, Xie Xie.